



# Acreage Answers

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## Rodent Control

by Linda S. Nelson, Dallas County Extension Director

Fall is the time of year when rats and mice are looking for shelter for the winter. It is a good time to check out the buildings on your acreage to discourage rodents.

Here are some suggestions for discouraging them.

- Plug any holes that are ¼ inch or larger. Anything that a pencil can go through is large enough for a mouse. It only takes a crack of ½ inch for a rat to squeeze through.
- Use 26 gage or heavier galvanized sheet metal, hardware cloth or concrete motor to close openings.
- Clean-up garbage and vegetation (such as fallen apples) around buildings. Store garbage, pet and livestock feed in metal cans with tight-fitting lids.
- Products that are advertised to scare or repel rodents may only work for a short time until the rodents become accustomed to them.
- Cats and dogs may actually attract more rodents than they catch. Rats and mice devour unfinished food left in feed dishes overnight. In addition, well-fed pets aren't interested in hunting rodents.
- Owls, hawks and snakes feed on large numbers of rodents. These wildlife species are good to encourage.
- Traps are a good choice. Mice are curious and if you have not caught one in the first two days move the trap. Rats on the other hand are cautious; it may take them a week to get close to the trap. Try leaving the trap unset and unbaited several days for them to accept it as part of the environment, then set the trap.

### Resources:

*Rat & Mouse Control* from UF/IFAS

*Commensal Rodents* April 6,1999

*Controlling Rats and Mice around Your Home*, May 24, 2000

These are electronic versions found online at E-Answers

<http://www.e-answersonline.org/> Use the search word rats.

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Please share *Acreage Answers* with your acreage neighbors. Call your local ISU Extension office to be placed on the mailing list for *Acreage Answers* and to give us suggestions for future articles.

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Acreage Answers is available  
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[www.extension.iastate.edu/polk/ag](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/polk/ag)

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Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating.

## Liability Claims

By Larry T. Wyatt, ALCM

Agricultural / Safety Engineer

Grinnell Mutual Group, Grinnell,  
 Iowa

Listed below are some of the things you can do to reduce your chances of having a liability claim.

1. Get rid of vicious dogs and pen your dogs up when you have company.



Even the gentlest dog can bite if surprised, hurt, provoked, threatened or disturbed while eating.

2. Get rid of dangerous or wild animals. Any wild or exotic animal capable of inflicting serious or fatal injuries is a liability claim waiting to happen. If your insurance company finds out you have those types of animals, it could lead to the cancellation of your insurance or it could void your insurance coverage if you have a claim.

3. Put a fence around your ponds, pools, manure lagoons and any area where an accidental drowning could occur. Check with your insurance company about the type and height of fence that may be required.

4. Make sure your livestock fences are strong enough and high enough to contain the animals you have fenced in. Livestock in a neighbor's field or on the

road can cause liability claims.

5. Make sure your farm equipment, tractors, and trailers have "Slow Moving Vehicle" emblems mounted on them at a height of 2 to 8 feet.
6. Don't "loan" tools or equipment to be used by others. You could be held liable if your tools or equipment are defective and the person you loan them to gets hurt while using them.
7. Make sure your stairs and sidewalks are in good shape with no broken or uneven areas that could cause trips or falls.

Clean snow and ice off the sidewalks and steps to your house in the winter.



8. Make sure you cover your loads (when appropriate or if traveling more than 30 mph), and tie down hay bales and other heavy loads with suitable straps or chains.
9. Don't burn trash or weeds on windy days or during dry to extremely dry conditions. Grass fires can get out of control and could burn down a neighbor's farm buildings.

## Planting Bulbs in the Fall

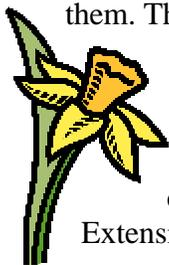
by Lynette Spicer, Master Gardener

**To enjoy the early color of daffodils, tulips and other spring-flowering bulbs, gardeners must plant this fall.**

Spring-flowering bulbs are most effective when a single variety is planted in a large clump or drift. Bulbs can be interplanted with other perennials. Suitable companions, such as daylilies and salvia, will help hide the dying bulb foliage.

All bulbs require good drainage, so avoid wet areas. Most bulbs perform best in partial to full sun. However, some very-early blooming bulbs, such as Siberian squill, can be grown under trees because they bloom and die back before the trees are fully leafed out.

Most modern tulips bloom reliably for only 2 or 3 years. Daffodils are one of the best performing spring-flowering bulbs in Iowa. Daffodils often bloom for 10 or more years. They also multiply and critters (rabbits and deer) don't like them. There are several



thousand daffodil varieties. For suggested cultivars, download ISU Extension publication

RG 312, *Suggested Daffodil Cultivars for Iowa*, at [www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs/ga.htm](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs/ga.htm) or ask for it at your county Extension office.

You can look for more information on planting spring bulbs at Horticulture Home Pest News

<http://www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/hornews/> Search words spring bulbs.

## Boxelder Bug Conventions

by Mary Ann deVries, Polk County Horticulturalist

Boxelder bugs – those dimwits of the insect world! If they're not wandering aimlessly around inside our houses, they're congregating by the hundreds outside on foundations or patios in some kind of end-of-summer bug convention. The sight of a boxelder bug, either traveling solo or in a herd, can be both repugnant and annoying.

Boxelder bug populations vary from year to year depending on the weather.



During the summer months, they live, feed and reproduce on many kinds of shade trees including maple and ash, as well as their namesake, the Boxelder tree.

In the fall, boxelder bugs drop down, hang out together, and look for a warm place to spend the winter. Eventually some of the more industrious ones find their way inside through cracks in the foundation or other small openings to our homes.

The good news is boxelder bugs are harmless. Inside our homes, they don't sting or bite or chew. However, eliminating them is not all that easy because they generally aren't killed by

household insecticides. Your best bet is to simply remove them by vacuuming or sweeping.

Better yet is to prevent their entry. Begin by sealing cracks and gaps around your house. A soapy water spray made with 5 tablespoons of liquid detergent per gallon of water is an environmentally friendly control if sprayed directly on the insects, but it offers no residual effect. If you're really determined to eliminate boxelder bugs outside, a garden insecticide (such as Sevin) can be used to break up the party. But be sure to follow label instructions!

## Holiday Money Management: Take the Bulge Out of Your Budget



By Janet Garkey

Family Resource Management Specialist

"Shop til you drop" does not have to be the reason for the season. Take steps now to make this holiday both fun and affordable by making a resolution to take the bulge out of your budget and avoid that credit card hangover in January.

Here are some tips:

**Credit cards:** Shop now for the card with the lowest interest rate and use that for holiday purchases ([www.bankrate.com](http://www.bankrate.com)). Put half your holiday purchases on one billing cycle and the other half

on the next cycle to spread out the “bulge.” Beware “skip-a-month” offers to defer billing. You will be charged interest.

**Budgeting:** Plan your holiday budget in advance and include the cost of the tree, postage, cards, food and entertaining. Plan potlucks and make cards on the computer. Help children make realistic wish lists, homemade gifts or gift certificates for relatives. Shop early and avoid the last minute rush.

**Online shopping:** Shop only with companies you know and trust, on sites with an unbroken key, closed padlock or address with “https.” Remember that credit cards offer the only protection if merchandise is shoddy or never received.

Free resource from your local ISU Extension office: “Holiday Tip\$ to Take the Bulge Out of Your Budget.”



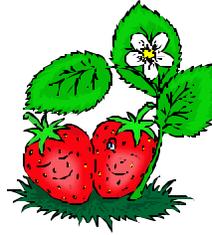
## Putting Strawberries to Bed

by Mary Ann deVries, Polk County Horticulturist

If you enjoyed a delicious crop of strawberries this summer, you’ll want to take some time now to protect your plants for winter.

Temperatures around 20° F can kill strawberry fruit buds and damage the plant’s roots and crown. The damage increases as temperatures go lower. For this reason, it’s imperative that

strawberry beds be mulched to provide wintertime protection.



Find a clean, weed-free mulching material such as oat straw, soybean straw, or chopped cornstalks. Tree leaves generally don’t work, because they tend to mat down and smother the plants rather than protect them.

Around the first of November, apply the mulch to the strawberry bed in a layer about 3 to 5 inches thick (2 to 4 inches after settling). It’s important to wait until the plants have had two or three hard freezes. Mulching actively growing plants can actually increase winter damage.

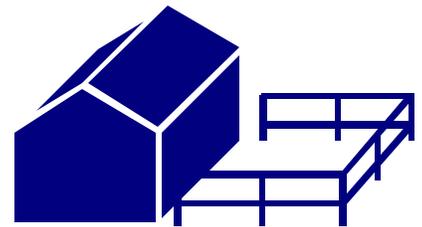
Next spring; leave the mulch in place until the plants show signs of growth. This helps prevent frost heaving. When about 25 percent of the plants show new yellow/white growth – usually around mid-April -- you can rake back the mulch from the plants. But save it. If there is a threat of a frost later, the mulch can be raked lightly back over the plants.

If the weather is dry, don’t forget to water at least once a week during the growing season. Then sit back and prepare to enjoy one of the true glories of the garden: the taste of fresh strawberries!

## Housing for Horses

by Carl Neifert, Extension Livestock Field Specialist and Dale Miller, Marion County Extension Education Director

Horses are housed in buildings primarily for the convenience of the horse owners. Under natural conditions, horses do not spend long periods of time in an enclosed area such as a stall or stable. In barns, horses become bored and may develop vices such as pawing, and cribbing. Barns with poor ventilation can cause respiratory discomfort for your horse. “Keep it simple” is a good motto for horse care. A large field or paddock with basic shelter is adequate housing.



If you are planning more elaborate housing, consider:

1. **Topography** - a level building site with 2-6 percent slope from the site to prevent standing water and muddy conditions.
2. **Zoning** - check local zoning ordinances for set-back distances and permits.
3. **Plan**- now for future buildings, paddocks, vehicle movement, snow removal, etc. Is the building just for horse housing?
4. **Cost** - stay within a budget. Get estimates and include **all** costs of building, stalls, utilities, site preparation,

etc. Specialized building can get costly in a hurry. Check alternatives such as stall design and size, wall construction, doors, lighting, ventilation, floor and barn building materials.

The Midwest Plan Service Horse Handbook (#15) and the Horse Industry Handbook (available at your county Extension office) can help answer some of your horse housing questions.

## Home Insulation

*By Tom Griener, ISU Extension Ag Engineer*

Looking for a way to save money on heating bills? Reduce drafts and increase comfort?

Half of the average Iowan's energy bill goes toward heating and cooling. By insulating your house, you can reduce this bill in some cases dramatically and be more comfortable, too.

Heat leaks from warmer areas to cooler areas. In the winter, warmth leaks out through walls, attics, and basements.

Insulation slows that rate of heat loss. The more insulation, the more the savings. You should have at least R-38 to R-44 in the attic (10-15 inches of insulation). In the summer heat leaks into the house making the air conditioner work harder, increasing your cooling bills. The more attic insulation, the more the savings in summer.

Insulation should be installed between any heated, (or cooled) space and an unheated space. If possible, insulate sidewalls and floors over unheated crawl

spaces to R-19 or more. Finished or heated basements should have a minimum of R-10. While insulating, you also should seal air leaks, caulk, provide vapor barrier, and install adequate ventilation in attics and crawl spaces.



Installing insulation and tightening up the house will change air and heat flows. Tightening a house affects combustion air for older natural draft gas-fired heating appliances and fireplaces. Often, after air tightening, there is insufficient air for proper combustion and drafting of vents and chimneys. Have a qualified heating contractor inspect your home to ensure your home will have adequate combustion and make-up air openings after your air-tightening work. The contractor might suggest you install additional combustion air openings to outdoors or suggest that you buy a new high efficiency direct vent sealed combustion heating unit, or change to electric heat. The contractor is right. These new heating appliances work well even in super-tight houses and will help you save even more on utility bills. The energy savings and extra safety might be worth the extra expense.

Don't put off insulating your home. Insulating will make you and your family more comfortable saves you money, and helps reduce the need for extra energy. Don't forget to check with your utility. Some power suppliers have programs to help you decide where to add insulation and to help you pay for it.

For more information on home insulation and energy savings, contact your county extension office or check housing bulletins at these websites:

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs/ho.htm> and

<http://www.energy.iastate.edu/efficiency/residential/homeseries/index.htm>